

Searching for ways to ensure its security, Ukraine is divided in views on Kosovo and NATO

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Dear readers: We restart the UCIPR's in-house publication, the weekly Research Update, with mixed feelings. On the one hand, we are happy to be able to produce the bulletin again. On the other hand, we regret that the first issue addressed by the Research Update after a long break is the crisis that may challenge the current security system and bring about reconsideration of a number of basic concepts.

However, sensing the need to contribute to better understanding of processes under way in this state, its relations with other powers and perspectives on key global and regional issues, we resume the regular coverage and analysis of what we feel are major developments that will inevitably have significant impact on Ukraine's policies, its emergent civil society and the general transition process.

We are grateful to our readers for your interest to our publication and the moral support that helped us to maintain it. It is our hope that you will continue to find the UCIPR Research Update useful and informative.

Sincerely,

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SEARCHING FOR WAYS TO ENSURE ITS SECURITY, UKRAINE IS DIVIDED IN VIEWS ON KOSOVO AND NATO

While leaders of 19 NATO states and 23 partners gathered in Washington D.C. to celebrate NATO's 50th anniversary, to sum up the progress and to approve a new strategy for the transforming role of the alliance, the Ukrainian parliament took the fifteenth attempt in the recent four weeks to adopt a resolution condemning NATO's actions in Yugoslavia and define new contents of the Ukraine-NATO relationship. The debate and the final document can be viewed as an illustration of Ukraine's "multi-vector" position, and cast some light on possible scenarios of development of the Ukraine-NATO relations in the period before and after the forthcoming presidential election in Ukraine.

Since the Kosovo crisis escalated, the Ukrainian parliament has had a number of votes on a strongly anti-NATO bill developed by communist leader of the foreign relations committee Borys Oliynyk and a long-standing communist party apparatchik, now chairman of the parliamentary committee for national security and defence Georgy Kryuchkov, set to arrange a "divorce" between Ukraine and NATO. The original document sought to forbid Ukraine's membership in any military-political alliances and outlaw the program of cooperation with NATO decreed by the President.

Although relations with NATO might have become yet another matter of confrontation between the President and the parliament, President Kuchma explicitly stated that even if the parliament were to vote for radical change of Ukraine's relations with NATO, the executive authorities would not necessarily conform to the decision. After the first vote failed with only 191 out of 450 MPs supporting the bill, Speaker Tkachenko promised he would continue bringing the issue to the agenda. Neither the Defence Ministry nor the Foreign Ministry agreed to comment on the call for granting military and/or technical assistance to Yugoslavia, made by Tkachenko, a strong supporter of the idea of Russian-Belarusian-Ukrainian unity, whose consistent pro-integration efforts have been recently finalized in Ukrainian parliament's resolution in favor of the state's full membership in the Moscow-dominated CIS

Interparliamentary Assembly. Commenting on the developments, former Ukrainian President Leonid Kravchuk, now a backer of Leonid Kuchma's re-election bid, told the press: "If I were the President, after such statements made by the Speaker I would disband the Verkhovna Rada immediately", as the Speaker is not authorized by the Constitution to change domestic and foreign policy directions that are set by the President.

After a series of debates and internal bargaining, the bill lost much of its aggressive anti-NATO rhetoric and was finally approved on April 23, 1999, by the minimum sufficient number of 226 votes, i.e., a simple majority of the 450-seat Ukrainian parliament. Of 318 MPs present at the session, 226 supported the resolution, 42 MPs voted against it (a noticeable minority of the 122-strong communist caucus) with 6 abstentions and several MPs who ignored the voting. The documents was adopted only after the most radical demands to suspend the program of partnership with NATO and to fire "pro-NATO ideologists" (an obvious hint to Foreign Minister Borys Tarasiuk and Secretary of the National Security Council Volodymyr Horbulin) were excluded from the text.

According to the resolution, the parliament of Ukraine condemned "NATO's actions of violence against Yugoslavia" while also condemning any sorts of ethnic cleansing, and urged the President to speak up against NATO's attempts to begin ground operations in Yugoslavia. The resolution ordered that the parliament, the Cabinet and ministries were firm and consistent in advocating Ukraine's national interests and maintaining the neutral non-allied status stipulated by the Declaration of independence and confirmed in the "General Directions of Ukrainian Foreign Policy". Although the resolution did not rule out cooperation with existing and new global and regional security systems, it emphasised that Ukraine should not join any military-political alliances. The latter may be regarded as a substantial progress achieved by moderate forces: while a possibility of NATO membership remains highly hypothetical for Ukraine, the CIS Tashkent pact option seems to be real, particularly if the balance of power in this state shifts to the left after the October 1999 presidential election.

Describing NATO leaders' intention to start the ground stage of the operation and take the area of the possible use of force beyond the limits of the alliance and without relevant sanctions of the UN Security Council as "extremely dangerous", the resolution urges the President to present the national program of cooperation with NATO for the period till 2001 for discussion and adoption by the parliament. This demand applies to all other agreements between Ukraine and international organisations. It is also expected that the parliament will resume debates over the nature and extent of Ukraine's relations with NATO after the latter's new agenda and strategic concept are published. Practical recommendations to the head of the state include enhancing Ukraine's mediation efforts (so far successfully ignored by both parties to the conflict), initiating a peace conference under the auspices of the UN in Kyiv and a global conference on collective security issues.

To enforce the legal framework for Ukraine's own security arrangements, the parliament demanded on the Cabinet to develop bills to fill the gaps in legislation on general national security provisions, on structures, personnel and functions of the Ukrainian armed forces and law-enforcement agencies, admission and deployment of foreign troops on the Ukrainian territory.

Contrary to Ukraine's commitments within previous disarmament agreements, the parliamentary resolution ordered the government to take urgent measures to halt dismantlement of strategic aviation complexes and missile silos. Earlier on, these steps towards disarmament were praised internationally among the most prominent signs of progress made by Ukraine since independence.

A Balance Sheet

As every action is motivated by considerations and interests, and every outcome has an impact, the Kosovo conflict may be regarded in terms of its implications for a number of active players, like NATO, its active observers, like Ukraine, and a major political process, like the forthcoming Ukrainian presidential election.

NATO:

As it is unlikely that Milosevic will yield to the pressure and agree to the deployment of an international peacekeeping force under the auspices of NATO and not the UN as he has insisted, and not the OSCE as suggested by Ukraine, NATO's intention to use ground troops to make the Yugoslav

leader more willing to cooperate - and to save face in the operation that has demonstrated initial miscalculations of its planners - may become a grim reality soon. Even the agreement to reduce Yugoslav troops in the province to the pre-conflict limits, reportedly expressed by Milosevic during his talks with Russia's special envoy Victor Chernomyrdin, may not convince NATO to consider stepping down and letting the UN become involved in the operation.

The alliance itself may need immense effort to maintain unity of perspectives of its members. After new members - Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary - joined the alliance, it may be increasingly difficult to reach consensus necessary for starting the ground operation.

Although the political voice of Russia has been losing strength internationally, NATO cannot ignore the fact that Russia's position can be completely disregarded. Commenting on Russia's attitude to the crisis, many analysts point out to the growing unity in anti-NATO sentiments among representatives of the whole spectrum of Russian political actors and predict a possible "cold war", further militarisation of Russia and increase in defence spending. Paradoxically, it is not the South-East European states that have been queuing in the second wave to NATO's open door - and who actually bear part of the burden associated with the Kosovo crisis - but the Baltic aspirants whose chances to be adopted increase in direct proportion to deterioration of the West's relations with Russia.

Furthermore, although Western Europe, remembering the UN failure to halt Milosevic's atrocities in mid-1990's, agreed to a full-scale military operation, the attitude in NATO member states may change as the operation goes on. As the economic condition of Yugoslavia, ruined by the NATO bombing and undermined by the international embargo, continues to deteriorate, it is becoming more obvious that intervention of ground troops may be redundant. On the one hand, it will inevitably result in casualties among the allied forces and increase the opposition to the operation in the NATO states. On the other hand, the likely resulting guerrilla war may contribute to further economic devastation of the war-stricken area and delay the return of hundreds of thousands of refugees now pouring into Western

European states.

While NATO can afford to ignore much of Russia's criticism, it will have to take into account the protests in Western European states and seek to maintain unity of attitudes within the alliance itself.

Ukraine:

According to director of the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies Yevgeniy Kozhokin, the Kosovo conflict represents a blend of information and psychological warfare that will be typical for the XXI century. In his view, the information and psychological factors are no less significant than the military actions - an argument that is well enhanced by the recent NATO bombing the headquarters of the Yugoslav state television in Belgrade - and that "an information and psychological fight for Ukraine has started in the world".

So far Ukraine's involvement has been limited to declaration of peaceful initiatives and some practical steps like allowing a Yugoslav air company to place seven of its passenger aircraft at Ukrainian airdromes, inviting refugee children for recreation, and sending humanitarian aid. In mid-April, Ukraine's Foreign Minister Borys Tarasiuk confirmed that Ukraine might send a peacekeeping force to Yugoslavia, but only with approval of the parliament (which is a usual procedure for sending Ukrainian peacekeepers), as part of an international peacekeeping force under the auspices of the UN or the OSCE.

Aside the foreign policy and moral dimensions of the Kosovo crisis, another question need to be addressed: how (and whether at all) Ukraine's losses associated with complying with the international embargo and the halt of navigation in the Danube will be compensated? While military and political implications for Ukraine remain theoretical, economically Ukraine has been seriously affected by the Kosovo crisis. According to chairman of the parliamentary committee for transportation and communications Yuri Kruk, by early April Ukraine's estimated losses from the economic blockade have amounted to US\$ 6.5 billion - a huge amount for Ukraine - and continue to grow at about US\$ 600 thousand a day. The Ukrainian Danube shipping company is losing about US\$300 thousand a day, acting head of the Foreign Ministry's Information Department Igor Hrushko confirmed, and added that

in order to address the issue Ukraine had initiated an urgent session of the Danube Commission member states in Budapest.

Ukraine is not alone in its economic grievances. The Kosovo crisis has had serious economic and potential environmental implications for the poorer part of Central and Eastern Europe - Yugoslavia, Macedonia, Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova - as well as for economically better-off Hungary, Austria and Italy. Also, it is mainly Europe that will have to bear the cost of accommodation of hundreds of thousands of Kosovar refugees who may later be unwilling to return to their ruined homeland.

President Kuchma:

With the Russian leadership indignantly boycotting the NATO summit, Ukraine remains practically the only state close to the conflict area that publicly deplores the NATO strikes on Yugoslavia while condemning Milosevic for ethnic cleansing and demanding peaceful resolution to the conflict. From this perspective, the Ukrainian leader has a dual opportunity to be praised by the West for his measured approach and peaceful proposals, while simultaneously being condemned by the left-wingers at home for whatever step he makes towards the West.

Nevertheless, forwarding his peaceful initiatives to NATO and UN leaders, Leonid Kuchma confirmed that no revision of Ukraine's relations with NATO would follow the Kosovo crisis and solemnly stated at the NATO summit that Ukraine was prepared to support any "constructive decision" on Kosovo. Almost immediately after the initial air strikes, President Kuchma announced Ukraine's peaceful initiative and offered to act as a mediator in the conflict. In an effort to score pre-election "pluses" and improve Ukraine's image internationally, the President offered a three-step settlement plan that would involve taking a sequence of simultaneous actions. Initially, the Yugoslav government was supposed to halt its military operation in Kosovo, withdraw the troops and security forces, create conditions for the return of refugees under control and protection of an international peacekeeping force under the auspices of the UN or, possibly, the OSCE, while NATO was supposed to stop the bombing, and the Kosovars were supposed to stop their military actions at the same time. The international peacekeeping force were to be deployed simultaneously with the withdrawal of the Yugoslav army. A critical detail of the plan was forming the peacekeeping force of representatives of neutral states, acceptable to all parties to the conflict, led by a political figure authorized by the UN Security Council.

At the second stage of the proposed operation, Kosovo refugees were to return to their homeland, accompanied by the peacekeepers, and the OSCE was supposed to launch its humanitarian mission to ensure organized return and accommodation of refugees and the forcibly displaced population.

The third stage would involve organizing a peace conference in the capital of one of neutral states. To facilitate implementation of the plan, the international community, states and international organizations were expected to provide humanitarian assistance to refugees and where large numbers of refugees arrive.

The proposals were very similar to the ones made by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, and yet, it took American, UN and NATO leadership about a month to mention them as a positive and welcome contribution to the process. Shortly after Leonid Kuchma's proposals were made, the arguments that Ukraine had a positive experience of preventing conflict escalation on its own territory, sending a peacekeeping force to the Balkans, assisting peaceful settlement in Abkhazia and the Transnistria did not prevent U.S. President Bill Clinton from remarking that Ukraine had interethnic problems of its own.

Although cost-effective and logical, the plan may not be possible unless all of the parties involved agree to it - the very problem that has not been overcome yet. Furthermore, apart from making the proposal, Ukraine has little to help its implementation. The President may be forced to answer a series of unpleasant questions about the involvement of Ukrainian peacekeeping battalion in Bosnia and face the choice of either withdrawing the Ukrainian peacekeepers, or keeping them in Bosnia under Ukrainian command, or ordering them to take part in combat action under the allied command. In the last case a new approval of the parliament will be required, and the pledged participation of Ukrainian peacekeepers may be made impossible if the parliament decides to show consistency and ban any involvement of Ukrainian troops other than under the auspices of the UN or the OSCE. Following Leonid Kuchma's arrival to the United States, most of Ukraine's leading newspapers published similar and rather dull accounts of President Clinton's and UN Secretary General Kofi

Annan's expressed approval of Ukraine's peaceful initiatives for Kosovo. However, it seems that what actually matters is Ukrainian President's explicitly demonstrated resolve that Ukraine and NATO should remain "special partners" whatever the domestic political and economic implications for this state may be, and, possibly, become even "more special" as an award for the measured and politically correct "no cleansing, no bombing" position.

Yevhen Marchuk:

Yevhen Marchuk, who has been perceived as a pro-European and generally pro-Western leader, recently made several strongly negative comments on NATO's intention to introduce ground troops in Yugoslavia. Commenting on the Kosovo crisis in October 1998, Yevhen Marchuk argued that "such a strike [on Yugoslavia], if not sanctioned by the UN Security Council, will be an unprecedented legal and political "default" of the West. A rejection of the great advance made to the international community. A rejection of its commitments to be a civilized political and legal leader, to build Europe without division lines, to create a global security model taking into account interests of all countries and peoples." Now NATO military operation in Yugoslavia is said to be the only way to stop Milosevic from harassing and exterminating Kosovars. According to Marchuk, if Russia follows the NATO intention with its decision to grant military assistance to Yugoslavia, Ukraine should let the Russian troops through its territory. "We must force the West to respect our national interests. Europe and the USA, in my view, have started to recall them very seldom... For that, one will have to stir the public opinion, psychologically "attack" the Western political establishment. Until it starts paying attention to our point of view." (Den, 20 April 1999). In his view, there is a need to understand that long-standing mutual grievances can hardly be resolved within several weeks of negotiations, particularly under the immense and biased pressure from the outside, as it is the case - and it is hard to disagree with him on that. Commenting on negative implications of the NATO way of settling the Kosovo conflict, Marchuk argues that if the precedent of territorial integrity in the case of Yugoslavia is compromised, no state that has compact ethnic minority settlements on its territory can be safe, as the precedent will pose a "terrible and direct danger" to them. The beginning of a ground operation, he argues, will start a general European crisis and ruin international law, and adds that "NATO is currently discussing some scenarios that radically differ from Ukraine's national interests". It is likely that the issue of Ukraine's national interests and its proximity to the "grey zone" of insecurity will be the arguments employed by critics of the current foreign and security policies.

Kosovo Crisis: Opportunities for Ukrainian Presidential Candidates:

The Kosovo crisis is being used by the incumbent President's rivals for gaining support of voters who share pro-Communist, pro-Russian, pan-Slavic and anti-NATO sentiments. While there is nothing original in arguments of confirmed left-wingers' like communist leader Petro Symonemko, chairwoman of Progressive Socialists Natalia Vitrenko or parliamentary Speaker Oleksandr Tkachenko who, notwithstanding other differences, are united in their pledges to disrupt the Ukraine-NATO relations, even relatively moderate candidates like Oleksandr Moroz and Yevhen Marchuk argue that the security "grey zone" in Europe makes it difficult to find arguments in favor of Ukraine's independent and neutral status. The growing anti-Western sentiments, particularly in the traditionally Russian-oriented east and south of Ukraine, has significantly enhanced the left-wingers' chances in the forthcoming presidential elections. The situation in Yugoslavia can inspire left-wingers and other opponents in the Ukrainian parliament to NATO bombing in Yugoslavia to demand closer military cooperation with Russia and urge President Kuchma to make anti-NATO steps like cancelling the "Peace Shield" international military exercise planned to take place in Ukraine later this year within the Ukraine-NATO special partnership Charter and Ukraine's commitments within the Partnership for Peace.

While many in Russia genuinely believe the state's mission is to protect Serbs, in Ukraine the attitude to the developments has been more pragmatic. As one of Socialist leaders Ivan Chyzh recently put it, "the use of the fact of NATO bombing of Yugoslavia and the issue of Ukraine's relations with NATO in the election campaign fits well into traditional campaign technologies. The theme of protecting the Slavs is being used for getting political scores and transforms into a routine election campaign slogan". However, if the conflict is not finally resolved by the end of this year (which is likely to be the case if NATO ground troops intervene and have to face guerrilla warfare in Yugoslavia), and if the October presidential election is won by a left-winger, Ukraine's policy towards the situation in Yugoslavia and to NATO in general may change, as it is the president who determines the state's foreign and security policy. Although it is still unlikely that under such worst-case scenario Ukraine will seriously consider

involvement in the conflict on the Serbs' side, there is a real chance that it will be moving rapidly towards full membership in the CIS common defence and security structures, primarily the Tashkent pact.

As the presidential campaign is rising in Ukraine, both the left advocates of closer ties with the former Soviet "brother nations" and their new formation opponents, the incumbent President included, are trying to gain as much as possible from the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia. No matter what the expected Strategic Concept and the Military Partnership Program will involve, communists will protest both the bombing, and the mere existence of NATO, and, particularly, President Kuchma's support for the alliance expressed by his visit to Washington for the celebration of NATO anniversary. Although traditionally the predominant majority of Ukrainian voters do not see candidates' perspectives on relations with NATO as key factors that determine their choice in favor or against a particular candidate, the presence of over 60% of NATO critics in the electorate cannot be disregarded in the election year.

A Few Options for Ukraine

Apparently, Ukrainian left-wingers' radical anti-NATO intentions have been discouraged by Russian President Boris Yeltsin's statement that outruled the possibility of Russian's military involvement. However, if NATO's plans for sending ground troops to Kosovo are realized, and the Russian position radicalizes, there will be more pressure for revision of Ukraine's neutral and nuclear-free status. The start has been made by the call for halting the dismantlement of missile silos, stipulated in the recent parliamentary resolution. Although technically Ukraine has neither capacity for resources to restore its nuclear capability, the very fact that the state's legislature is seriously discussing that option should ring the alarm bell.